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ABSTRACT

This guide is the second in a series of eleven generated in 1978 as the result of workshops that focused on peer training, a different approach to teaching. The workshops provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine the relationship between their specific role group and community education and the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness. This booklet focuses on community education as seen by local and state school board representatives. Topics considered include the power and responsibilities of school boards, benefits derived from and problems of community education, levels of school board involvement, program evaluation, board skills required for developing community education, and strategies for increasing interest and skills. (Author/LD)

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SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Role Guide Series #2

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PREFACE

This booklet is a result of two three-day Role Training and Peer Interaction Academies which were held in 1978 and funded by a training grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Community Education Program. The format for both Academies was designed to focus upon peer training, a method which has proven to be a useful teaching and information sharing approach. The sessions provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine in-depth:

a) the relationship between their specific role group and community education, and

b) the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness.

Material development phases were interwoven with both structured and unstructured problem-solving activities. The follow-up activities and publications of the Role Guide Series were made possible from grants by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through a sharing of information, all participants gained knowledge. The information shared in this booklet is intended for use both by experienced individuals and those just entering the field. The booklet can help the experienced individual to become more aware of additional aspects of the role and of directions being taken by others. It can assist the novice in gaining an overview of the role as seen by those who have worked in this capacity. The information also can be used as a means for guiding others in the community to gain a better understanding of the role and its relationship to community education.

AS SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS, WE BELIEVE

We believe that learning is a lifelong process which takes place not only in formal classrooms but in the community and in the home as well.

We believe that when individuals, family, and community groups work together to solve common problems, learning results which enhances self, family, and community.

We believe that citizens have a right to be involved in choosing their own and their community's destiny.

We believe in supporting participatory and decision-making opportunities for all citizens and supporting citizen involvement in the activities and services which make maximum use of public facilities, especially the school, and which promote individual, family, and community betterment.

We believe that the cooperation and coordination of the delivery of human and community services (including education) are in the best interests of the taxpayers, the community, and the patrons of services.

We believe that the cooperative process known as community education will produce more effective and efficient use of local resources; will develop home, school, and community partnerships that will help youth and adults to learn; and will provide an avenue for concerted citizen effort toward improving the quality of life of a community.

Therefore, we believe that school board support for the philosophy and practice of community education is wise and essential.

INTRODUCTION

Typically, school board members are leaders in the community, politicians, volunteers, "sounding boards," and policy makers. Each has various time commitments and certain personal agendas, one of which is to be re-elected or re-appointed.

The following pages present community education as seen by both local and state school board representatives. Participants of the School Board Role Group indicated a belief that the implementation of community education could provide a means of improving their school system and community. There was general consensus regarding the role of school boards in both development and implementation of community education and regarding future directions required for school boards and community education.

The role group members perceived the community education process as a mandate for action. The definition of community education used by the school board representatives was:

> The community education process is obligated to supply a comprehensive and coordinated delivery system for providing educational, recreational, social and cultural services for all people in a community and to provide an opportunity for people to work together to achieve community and self-improvement.

SCHOOL BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

The school board is empowered by law to provide for the education of children. It is the responsibility of the members of the school board to provide policy guidance for the superintendent and the staff. Specific duties that are applicable to the majority of school boards include:

- Hiring of a superintendent who will implement their policies and priorities.
- Developing priorities for the preparation of the educational budget for the school system.
- Developing support for budget approval and funding.
- Acquiring knowledge about educational programs.
- Developing a link with the community by involving advisory groups in the decision-making process, holding open meetings, encouraging citizen participation, and attending community meetings.

School board efforts to develop community linkages relate directly to community education's community involvement component. School board members can enhance the implementation of community education by developing an effective link with the community groups which they represent to shape policy and influence the management of local educational programs. Utilizing a broad, community-support base, a school board member can assume the leadership in affecting the changes needed to achieve quality education in that community.

School board members frequently accept additional, yet related, leadership responsibilities

and services to the community involved. The most useful leadership possibilities suggested, which can aid the development and implementation of community education and which can be a result of either individual or group action, include:

1) Because it is the school board's direct responsibility to employ the superintendent, members can either hire one who is already supportive and knowledgeable of the concepts of community education or they can convince the superintendent that the concepts are of benefit to the system.

2) A related leadership possibility is to increase the support and understanding of fellow board members who do not share a commitment to the philosophy.

3) School board members can help develop community support through their own activities. They can build a support base of other community leaders and show other agencies how they can benefit from community involvement. School board members have opportunities to speak to many groups in the community and usually are, or become, aware of the interests of the audience. Thus, they can use these opportunities to promote community education by explaining how community education techniques and programs can assist in advancing those interests. These public relation activities also can be useful when interacting with officials in other areas of government.

4) Advisory committees are valuable for the broad-based support they can provide and for the information regarding the needs of the community which they can supply to the board. The board also can appoint study or ad hoc groups to develop background papers and to provide information on specific topics. Advisory committees can be of assistance in helping boards set priorities and goals, especially in times of scarce funding or other difficult situations.

It is important to remember that the advisory

committee involvement must be meaningful involvement. Unfortunately, in the past citizen advisory groups mandated by federal and state funding too often have opportunities for only token involvement. Misuse or token use of citizen groups is recognized quickly and is rightfully resented. The school board members must use the input of the various established and ad hoc advisory committees in making wise educational decisions. Board members establish credibility through listening to various viewpoints and arriving at objective decisions based on overall need. Effective communications skills used by school board members will facilitate this process.

5) Board members can seek, and encourage administrators to seek, funds from a variety of available sources, including federal, state, and private funding. Board members can encourage the staff and superintendent to think creatively as they explore opportunities to expand and develop programs for and with the community. Seeking funds and resources to support educational innovation and improvement should not exclude the resources of the community. The community has much to offer through volunteer help, enrichment and tutorial opportunities often provided by other agencies, churches, community groups, and local businesses.

6) School board members can influence the public school building architects as they design new schools or prepare plans for remodeling or renovating buildings for multi-use centers. Opportunities to utilize this leadership possibility are increasing because of the growing number of school boards who are faced with the economic necessity of closing and/or reprogramming school buildings due to declining student population.

7) Acceptance of the leadership responsibility school board members can have in linking the input and resources of communities to educational policies and planning is critical to the realization of an effective community education program. Therefore, the school board should adopt a resolution regarding community education so that the superintendent has a mandate to follow.

It is a political reality that community education will not succeed without the support of the school board and the superintendent. The school board has the responsibility of developing the public support for community education policy and guidelines. The superintendent has the administrative responsibility to make it work through school management and cooperation with other agencies.

School board members must not get involved in the administration or on-going leadership of community education. Once a community education project has been implemented and is an on-going process in the community, the areas of emphasis and responsibility of the school board members will change little if the board has been functioning properly as a policy-making body. Continuing responsibilities include:

- Directing the superintendent to work with other agencies in a coordinated and co-operative manner.

- Providing the funds for the superintendent to carry out the program as directed by the school board.

- Dealing in a forthright manner with the press and other forms of media. Board members have a special role to play in communication and should make full use of the exposure they get from their role.

- Directing the superintendent to do or have done a needs assessment and insure that it happens by providing a policy or mechanism which directs that a needs assessment be done.

- Setting a policy that advisory councils must be reflective of the community served. The board has a clear duty to see that all citizens are represented.

- Developing policies that will encourage and facilitate involvement of citizens. This is perhaps the major area for continued support by the school board.

THE POWER OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Role group members were in firm agreement that one of the mistakes that advocates are making is that they are not, in fact, involving school boards and school board members at the local level and at the state level. School board members are policy makers, and they have political clout and political power.

A school board member may act as an individual when advocating a needed philosophy or action. He/she may participate as an individual in the community in any desired political activity. However, when establishing educational policy, the board members no longer may operate as individuals but, rather, must function as a member of a group where the majority vote decides. A board member has no power as an individual to establish educational policy. The entire school board must act in order for a policy to be established.

School board members are political. They must vote according to what they perceive as being in the best interest of the citizens of the community. They develop their credibility in dealing with educational problems by not having vested interests, by nurturing a free exchange of ideas with the community, and by being available and responsive. However, citizens must remember that governance of the educational system is the shared responsibility of all school board members as they attempt to represent the inputs and interests of various community groups.

It is encouraging to note that citizens usually do not hesitate to call school board members to express their opinions and concerns. Most school board members are involved and committed individuals. They gain their satisfaction from knowing that they are making a contribution to the community as a whole because the material rewards of the job

are usually small and the problems encountered are great. Therefore, community respect for their role is well deserved and equal to the important functions to be performed as citizen leaders in education.

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

In order for a school board to adopt and support community education actively, consideration has to be given to how the community, and, realistically, the school board will benefit from its adoption and implementation. Potential benefits include:

- Increased community support for public schools through increased involvement and participation
- Additional volunteers during regular school day hours
- Less vandalism to school property
- Additional variety to the curriculum offerings
- Increased economic support for the school system (This can be direct or indirect support depending on the funding laws of the local sub-division)
- Increased cost-sharing and additional resources provided through interagency cooperation
- Increased opportunities for eliminating some of the opposition to school-based programs
- Increased opportunities for public access to school board members and to the decision-making process
- Enhanced visibility of educational programs and services through a shared communications network

Often there are problems in implementing the community education philosophy. Major concerns and obstacles can be:

- Ignorance, misinformation, and "turf" protection which cause individual citizens, school administrators and/or agency representatives to resist supporting and implementing community education

- Jurisdictional questions in the division of responsibility within the school system and with partner agencies

- Citizen apathy, lack of information, and mistrust of the school system which might require considerable outreach and demonstration of good faith before community education would be accepted

- Clash of personalities, negative attitudes, or inadequate communication skills of leaders which might delay or slow the interagency cooperative process

- Lack of identification or shared missions in communities which impedes cooperation of community agencies with public schools

LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Citizen Involvement

Community education is successful in a given area only if the citizenry want the program and feel responsible for it. School board members have the responsibility to represent this view.

Leadership in education is derived from the public, who are represented by school board members. It is important to demonstrate that public schools belong to the community and not to an educational establishment. The extent to which community ownership is demonstrated depends on the willingness of the school system, led by the board and superintendent, to involve citizens in the policy-making and educational processes and to allow schools to be used for a variety of activities. School staff must recognize that the involvement of citizens is not limited to after-school hours, but that it also includes the involvement of volunteers and other citizens during the regular school day. Responsible citizen involvement can be a strong community resource for support of the K-12 program as well as the community education process.

Partner-Agency Involvement

Providing a supportive climate for interagency program coordination and the joint use of facilities is a responsibility of a school board. Leadership tools in creating a supportive climate include the board members' own personal commitment and political leverage. The school board, as the link between the public and school administration, must demonstrate to both groups its own belief that schools are a part of the cooperative process.

A logical way for school boards to begin to support community education is to encourage the use of public school facilities for community education

programs. However, school board members, as policy-makers, must have a broad view of the potential for community education in co-programming and other cooperative endeavors. They must accept the fact that outreach efforts from community education programs can operate in a town hall basement, church, library or other public facility and still warrant the support of the educational system. Interagency cooperation broadens the possibilities and opportunities for the use of community facilities. School boards can encourage the development of community education as an interagency effort, not just as a school-based or school-centered program. The important point to remember is that through interagency cooperation the most suitable facilities, the most effective programs, and the most efficient delivery system can be identified and used.

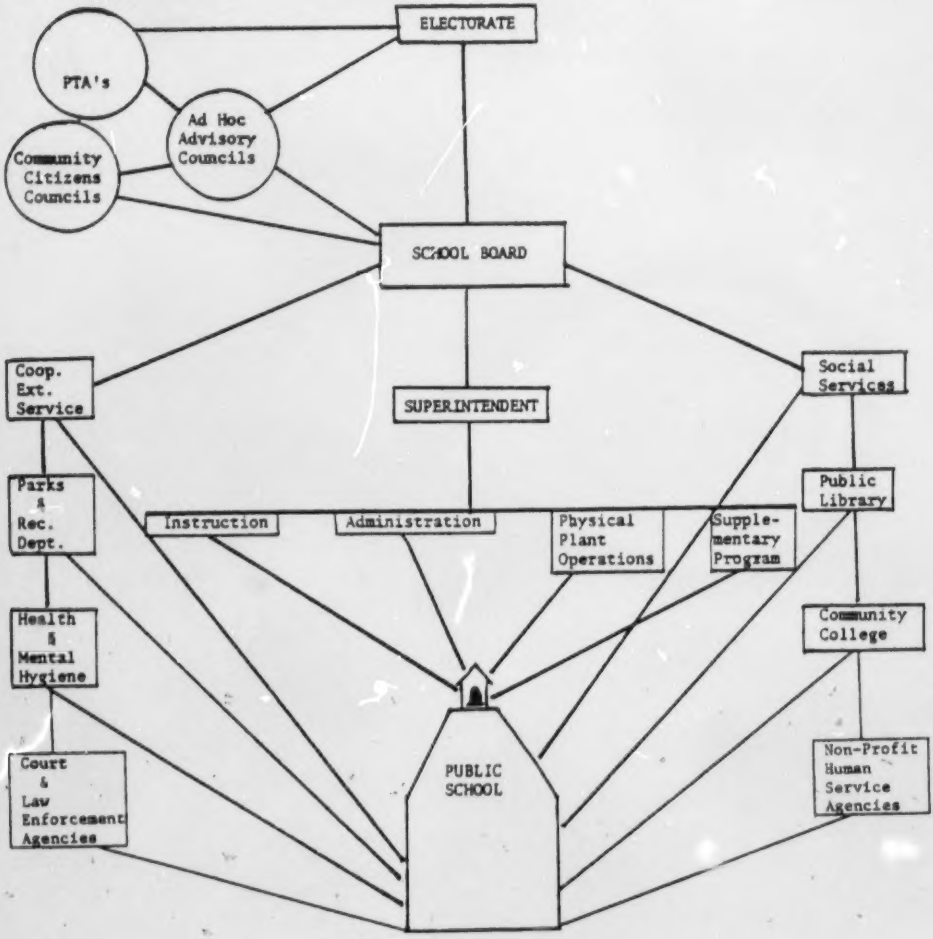
Declining enrollments and the closing of public school buildings present an opportunity for interagency cooperation. The question has been raised of whether or not school boards have a responsibility to see that those buildings are used in communities. Presently, most boards do not have that legal responsibility. Once the school is closed it may go back to the funding authority or back to the county government. However, when other uses for those buildings are identified, the board can help to build support for actions that are responsive to and protective of communities and that expand the use of the closed school buildings through interagency cooperation and planning.

Local-State Level Involvement

Local boards of education have an opportunity to encourage the state board of education and the state superintendent of schools to become involved in community education. Local boards can urge the state board to pass resolutions, to seek state and federal funds through the state education agency, and to support the state superintendent in working with the heads of other state agencies. When cooperation and involvement at the state level can be obtained, it is easier to promote similar interagency participation at the local level. A leadership push from local to state and back to local can

be an effective loop to maintain and enhance inter-agency cooperation.

The following chart depicts the kinds of involvement and variety of contacts a school board member may have:



EVALUATION

A major responsibility of school board members is to evaluate the effectiveness of the superintendent as a part of a full staff evaluation process. In turn, school boards depend upon the superintendent and his staff to evaluate all school programs. Program evaluation is the process which indicates how well the school board policies, translated into educational objectives, have been met. The performance of school board members is evaluated by the electorate either indirectly (board appointed by an elected official) or directly (board elected by the citizens). If the superintendent's actions have been in accordance with board policies, he/she can be expected to be reappointed. Similarly, if board policies reflect the thinking of the electorate, board members can expect to retain their positions. Citizens, therefore, are a part of the evaluation process.

Board members need to look at the overall impact of programs as related to the goals of the school system, cost efficiency requirements, and broad indicators of program effectiveness (including interrelationships among programs). When board members support community education, it is essential that they require documentation to indicate the success of a community education program and that the documentation actually be related to the success of the community education program and not to the success of other programs. Too often the evaluation of community education is limited to a measurement of the number of people participating in after-school programs. Indicators of program effectiveness should be much broader than "headcounting". Board members can enhance the program evaluation process through careful and insightful inquiry at the time the program report is presented to them.

SKILLS FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

The skills and personal qualities required for school board members to be effective in the development of community education are the same as those necessary for any public figure who wishes to build support for a concept, policy, or program in which he/she believes. The school board member's role in community education is as a policy maker. Although some of the following characteristics may be appropriate for other groups in the community education process, they are <u>essential</u> for school board members.

1. Commitment. Personal commitment to the concept of community education. This commitment must be recognized as a board member fulfills his/her role as policy maker and public figure. It is not enough for a board member to "be identified with" a particular policy or interest. Commitment must be demonstrated through public and non-public actions.

2. Persuasiveness. An effective style of communicating both on the individual and group level is essential in developing support for community education.

3. Knowledge and awareness. A board member must be well-informed, not only about school programs that could be related to community education, but also about community issues, the functioning of other community service agencies, the history and current status of community education nationally, and possible sources of funding.

4. Sensitivity to public issues. A board member must recognize the issues that are of concern to the community and encourage

the resolution of those issues through the community education process.

5. Possession of negotiating ability. A board member must know where and when to bargain, with whom, and what the stakes are if he/she wants to promote community education as a concept. Lobbying is an essential part of the role and can be done with integrity.

6. Willingness to take a "back seat" when necessary. A board member should be "open" to other groups and agencies assuming leadership in community education whenever and wherever appropriate.

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING THE LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

An essential route to reaching school board members is through state associations of local boards of education. These associations plan in-service activities and are natural avenues for offering information and training regarding community education. Any invitation or information which goes to board members should be designed especially for them and should reflect recognition of the importance of their role in the community and, thus, in the community education process.

The more information provided for school board members as individuals, the more positive they can become as a group and, thus, the more effective in developing policy. The following are suggestions for the kind of assistance to school board members that will increase their interest in and ability to promote community education. It is assumed that for each activity listed, the planning will be done and implemented by a local or state level individual who has some responsibility for community education and will incorporate, when possible, the advice or assistance of board members who have some knowledge of and/or interest in community education.

1. Group process training. This training can be a one-day session in which a resource person presents information and techniques on how to be an effective group participant and leader. Care should be taken to design the session for the individuals in attendance. Although group process training could be sponsored by community education, it is not necessary to present specific information regarding community education programs. Most board members will appreciate the training opportunity.

2. Specially designed sessions for school

board members at general community education conferences. Board members need an understanding of the comprehensive nature of community education philosophy and what their role is in implementing it. It is important to emphasize that they have a distinct and important part to play in program development.

3. Show-and-tell sessions and on-site visitations. These experiences may relate either to outside "model" programs or local activities that have a relationship to community education. It should be remembered that there may be projects which are not labeled as "Community Education" but which reflect that approach and philosophy. Board members may need assistance first in understanding what their own locality is doing and then in attempting to expand these activities; they also may need exposure to actual programs in other localities or other states.

4. Discussion sessions for school boards and advisory or policy boards of other agencies that could participate in community education. The initial meeting should be designed to encourage both formal and informal information sharing and discussion of potential opportunities for coordination and cooperation. It should provide an opportunity for these groups to learn what is being done by others in community service, to examine issues which are relevant to each agency, and to pave the way for future planning sessions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Because, as school board members, WE BELIEVE:

- Learning is a lifelong process;
- Citizens have the right and responsibility to be involved;
- Cooperation and coordination of community resources are in the best interests of the citizen taxpayers; and
- Community education facilitates home-school-community partnerships to help youth and adults learn;

Therefore, as school board members committed to the concept of Community Education, WE WILL facilitate the cooperative process by:

- Supporting citizen and parent groups' leadership capabilities as youth and community advocates;
- Moving forward under today's economic realities to share the local school facility and leadership capacity with service agencies to avoid duplication and to maximize service effectiveness;
- Striving to maintain open lines of communication among the school board, citizens, and school administrators;
- Developing home and community partnerships with schools to meet the identified learning needs of youth and community; and
- Expanding and supporting the community education leadership capacity of school board members, perhaps through the state school

board associations;

and WE WILL implement a community education program by:

- Adopting a community education policy and guidelines;
- Cooperatively developing and approving with partner agencies a long range plan to implement community education;
- Approving a budget that includes funding for community education
- Seeking to identify other local community resources; and
- Identifying additional state and federal resources to supplement local cooperative planning and training needs

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